

The Node *... where a leaf arises from a stem*



The Node is a bilingual publication dedicated to global HIV/AIDS issues by Red Ribbon Centre, the UNAIDS Collaborating Centre for Technical Support

PRESS RELEASE

New report from UNAIDS shows that AIDS can be ended by 2030 and outlines the path to get there

GENEVA, 13 July 2023—A new report released today by UNAIDS shows that there is a clear path that ends AIDS. This path will also help prepare for and tackle future pandemics and advance progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The report, *'The Path that Ends AIDS'*, contains data and case studies which highlight that ending AIDS is a political and financial choice, and that the countries and leaders who are already following the path are achieving extraordinary results.

Botswana, Eswatini, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Zimbabwe have already achieved the "95-95-95" targets. That means 95% of the people who are living with HIV knowing their HIV status, 95% of the people who know that they are living with HIV being on lifesaving antiretroviral treatment, and 95% of people who are on treatment being virally suppressed. A further 16 other countries, eight of them in sub-Saharan Africa, the region which accounts for 65% of all people living with HIV, are also close to doing so.

"The end of AIDS is an opportunity for a uniquely powerful legacy for today's leaders," said Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of UNAIDS. "They could be remembered by future generations as those who put a stop to the world's deadliest pandemic. They could save millions of lives and protect the health of everyone. They could show what leadership can do."

The report highlights that HIV responses succeed when they are anchored in strong political leadership. This means following the data, science, and evidence; tackling the inequalities holding back progress; enabling communities and civil society organizations in their vital role in the response; and ensuring sufficient and sustainable funding.

Progress has been strongest in the countries and regions that have the most financial investments, such as in eastern and southern Africa where new HIV infections have been reduced by 57% since 2010.

Thanks to support for and investment in ending AIDS among children, 82% of pregnant and breastfeeding women living with HIV globally were accessing antiretroviral treatment in 2022, up from 46% in 2010. This has led to a 58% reduction in new HIV infections among children from 2010 to 2022, the lowest number since the 1980's.

Progress in the HIV response has been strengthened by ensuring that legal and policy frameworks do not undermine human rights, but enable and protect them. Several countries removed harmful laws in 2022 and 2023, including five (Antigua and Barbuda, the Cook Islands, Barbados, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Singapore) that have decriminalized same-sex sexual relations.

The number of people on antiretroviral treatment worldwide rose almost fourfold, from 7.7 million in 2010 to 29.8 million in 2022.

2 However, the report also sets out that ending AIDS will not come automatically. AIDS claimed a life every minute in 2022. Around 9.2 million people still miss out on treatment, including 660 000 children living with HIV.

Women and girls are still disproportionately affected, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Globally, 4,000 young women and girls became infected with HIV every week in 2022. Only 42% of districts with HIV incidence over 0.3% in sub-Saharan Africa are currently covered with dedicated HIV prevention programmes for adolescent girls and young women.

Almost one quarter (23%) of new HIV infections were in Asia and the Pacific where new infections are rising alarmingly in some countries. Steep increases in new infections are continuing in eastern Europe and central Asia (a rise of 49% since 2010) and in the Middle East and North

Africa (a rise of 61% since 2010). These trends are due primarily to a lack of HIV prevention services for marginalized and key populations and the barriers posed by punitive laws and social discrimination.

Funding for HIV also declined in 2022 from both international and domestic sources, falling back to the same level as in 2013. Funding amounted to US\$ 20.8 billion in 2022, far short of the US\$ 29.3 billion needed by 2025.

There is an opportunity now to end AIDS by increasing political will by investing in a sustainable response to HIV through financing what matters most: evidence-based HIV prevention and treatment, health systems integration, non-discriminatory laws, gender equality, and empowered community networks.

“We are hopeful, but it is not the relaxed optimism that might come if all was heading as it should be. It is, instead, a hope rooted in seeing the opportunity for success, an opportunity that is dependent on action,” said Ms Byanyima. “The facts and figures shared in this report do not show that as a world we are already on the path, they show that we can be. The way is clear.”

In 2022, an estimated:

- 39.0 million people globally were living with HIV
- 29.8 million people were accessing antiretroviral therapy
- 1.3 million people became newly infected with HIV
- 630 000 people died from AIDS-related illnesses

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IAS 2023
23-26 July
Brisbane and virtual

12th International AIDS Society Conference on HIV Science (IAS 2023), Brisbane, Australia

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The 12th IAS Conference on HIV Science (“IAS 2023”) was held successfully in Brisbane, Australia, from 23 to 26 July 2023. Over 5,000 participants of various backgrounds across the world attended this four-day conference in person and virtually. Hong Kong participants from the Department of Health, Hospital Authority, academic institutions and private sector had attended the conference.

IAS 2023, one of the most important conferences on HIV research and its applications, featured over 1,400 abstract presentations across five main tracks: fundamental science, clinical science, epidemiology and prevention science, social and behavioral science, and implementation science, economics, systems, and synergies. Expert-led plenary sessions, symposia, satellites, oral abstract sessions, and a poster exhibition were all part of the conference, providing attendees with a variety of opportunities to learn about the latest research and advancements in the field.



Highlights of the conference

Progress towards elimination

The global progress towards ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 was reviewed in a plenary session “Toward elimination”. One of the targets discussed was a 90% reduction in HIV incidence compared with 2010 baseline. Assuming a constant rate of progress, by the end of 2022, a 54% reduction in



HIV incidence should have achieved. However, the world is substantially behind the global target, with only a 38% reduction in HIV incidence witnessed by the end of 2022. To achieve the goal of ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030, political and economic directives must be made, and inequalities within and across countries must be addressed. The plenary session highlighted the urgency of the situation and the need for continued efforts and investments to achieve the global goal of ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

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#SayZero

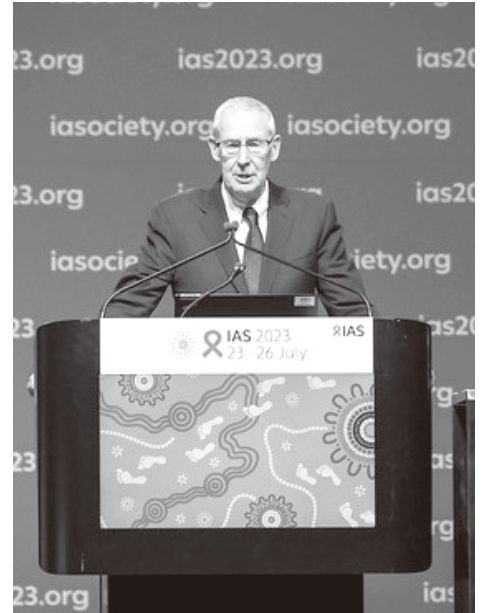
With the launch of “The role of HIV viral suppression in improving individual health and reducing transmission: policy brief” by WHO on 22 July 2023, one day before the start of IAS 2023, WHO has made it clear in very explicit language that zero risk of transmitting HIV is attainable through adherence to appropriate HIV treatment. This statement was

underpinned by a systematic review published by the Lancet on the same day, which demonstrated that people living with HIV who have an undetectable viral load using any WHO prequalified combination of sample and testing platform and continue taking medication as prescribed have zero risk of transmitting HIV to their sexual partners. These data provide a powerful opportunity to destigmatise HIV and promote adherence to anti-retroviral therapy through dissemination of this positive public health message.

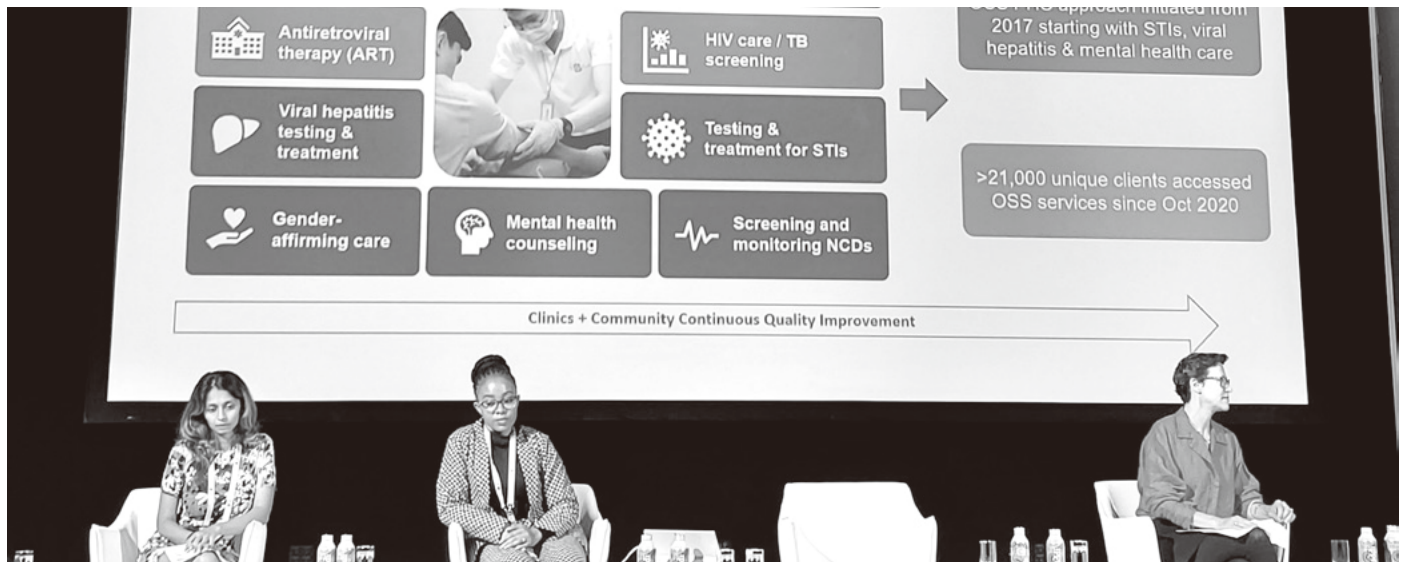
Long-acting biomedical interventions

In different sessions, a number of new and future long-acting drugs in the pipeline for HIV treatment/prevention were discussed, including long-acting injectable cabotegravir/rilpivirine, lenacapavir, islatravir and broadly neutralizing antibodies.

These drugs have the potential to revolutionize HIV treatment and prevention by offering extended protection with fewer dosages, reducing the burden of treatment and improving adherence. The discussions on these new and future drugs generated excitement among attendees and highlighted the importance of ongoing research and development in the field.



Integrated, person-centered approach



New WHO guidelines and policy briefs focusing on innovations, integration, and person-centered response were presented during the conference. One notable publication was the “Primary health care and HIV: convergent actions: policy considerations for decision-makers” released on 20 July 2023. The policy brief highlights the importance of adopting a primary care approach to achieve universal health coverage and end the AIDS epidemic. To optimize the synergies, integrating stand-alone HIV programming to integrated primary care programmes should be adopted. The one-stop shop model, as exemplified in Vietnam, offers an integrated, person-centered approach that combines prevention (Pre-exposure prophylaxis, post-exposure prophylaxis), screening & testing (HIV, STI, TB, viral hepatitis, NCD), treatment (anti-retroviral therapy, TB, STI) and other services (gender affirming care, mental health counselling) in Vietnam. This approach not only improves access to HIV services but also addresses other health needs of individuals in a comprehensive and holistic manner.



Conclusion

This four-day conference covered a wide range of topics related to HIV prevention and treatment, including long-acting technologies, management of co-infections, sexual health, STI prevention, and community engagement. It served as a platform for researchers, healthcare providers, policymakers, and community advocates to come together and share their knowledge and perspectives on HIV/AIDS, helping to advance the fight against the epidemic.

